As the nineteen twenties began Lawrence was in a state of indecision. His efforts towards a total statement of his thinking, as in the novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, had been followed by various attempts, particularly in his fictions, to reflect on the current state of Europe—which was endeavouring to regain some kind of stability after the destruction and devastation of the war.

One might have thought that, having shown his ability as a storyteller, the major enterprise that awaited him was the creation of a large and important novel. In the devastation of the 1920s, however, when the best a poet such as T. S. Eliot could hope for was to portray the future state of the world as a ruined landscape in *The Waste Land*, the circumstances were hardly opportune for such an achievement.

Instead, Lawrence moved outside Europe altogether, pursuing the possibility of conveying the complexities of the human condition on a wider scale. Where to choose was a more difficult matter, since most of the available options would have taken him to a civilization older than Europe—in the East, for instance. Eventually his plan was to go to America, but that presented problems of its own, owing partly to the limitations of its transcendental tendencies. More promising was Ceylon, which had for him the advantage that his recently formed friends the Brewsters were planning to visit there themselves.

For some time he vacillated—to such a degree that his Cambridge biographer finds it difficult to account for the various twists and turns of his resolution; but in time it was to Ceylon that the Lawrences directed themselves. Although they spent a pleasurable time there, however, it soon became clear to Lawrence himself that it was not a place where his work was likely to prosper. This was partly a matter of temperament: he realized that the main feature of the culture—and certainly the one that
attracted Brewster—was its cultivation of calmness, whereas he felt the need for constant friction and opposition. At a more mundane level, he was repelled by the night noises of the tropics, for the violence and harshness of which he had been quite unprepared.1 Above all, however, he found the climate generally unsuitable, insupportable both for its heat and for its enervating effect.

The most obvious next destination was Australia, which had the advantage of seeming to be at an opposite pole to Britain. Here, surely, one would have the opportunity of observing a country in its primitive state, before human beings began to exercise fully their powers of development and which would provide a polar opposite to what Western civilization had achieved during its centuries of cultivation.

What the Lawrences actually found there proved to be strangely different. Although commonly thought of as a ‘young’ country, Australia had already enjoyed more than a century during which the human beings who settled there had been required to meet many new challenges—some of which called for methods already available in the culture they had left behind them, while others offered unexpected new opportunities for developments of a new kind. Sydney, to which they after a time directed themselves, was already a thriving city with its own cultural and religious centres.

A complicating factor was furnished by the events of the recent war, in which Britain, as head of the world’s most important empire, had called on the various countries under its influence to join the struggle. The hostilities had in fact often been initiated by European states who had joined the enterprise of colonization so late that they felt the need to resort to violence in pursuit of their kindred objectives, Many Australians had joined forces, based in their country and New Zealand, that were being called upon to provide a possible new front for campaigns already in progress. By 1922, when the Lawrences arrived, the impact of recent events had been twofold: on the one hand, service personnel had returned to their country, stunned and chastened by the experience of mechanized warfare, while on the other, labourers and similar workers had found themselves in contact with men expressing their discontent with a civilization based largely on finance.

In these circumstances, it was not surprising that the first sight to attract the Lawrences’ attention was the large amount of detritus

1 See the account of his unexpectedly harsh and accurate rendition of their ‘chilling shrillness’ in Richard Aldington’s Portrait of a Genius But ... London: Heinemann, reprinted 1965, p. 236.